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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 003254

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: INDIANS STATE IRANIAN PRESIDENT WILL NOT VISIT
DELHI

Classified By: POLCOUNS Ted Osius for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has categorically denied the reported upcoming visit of Iranian President Ahmedinejad to Delhi this week, while Indian and Pakistani press continue to speculate on the purpose of the rumored visit. End Summary.

Ahmedinejad,s Visit "A Total Rumor"

¶2. (C) In response to Indian and Pakistani press reporting that Iranian President Ahmedinejad would visit Delhi this week for talks with Indian leaders about the rising tensions between India and Pakistan, MEA Joint Secretary (Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran Division) T.C.A. Raghavan told PolCouns December 30 that Ahmedinejad's upcoming visit was a "total rumor", adding that "when the Indian government says it does not want mediators, that applies to everyone". (Comment: Raghavan was underscoring how India has rejected past offers from Iran to mediate on Kashmir, and possibly delivering a message that India does not want interference from the United States either. End Comment.)

¶3. (SBU) Indian media, citing an article which appeared in the Pakistani newspaper "International, The News", began to widely report on Ahmedinejad's supposed upcoming visit this week. The news was first picked up by the Pakistani channel GEO TV and later covered by news-portal Sify.com. However, MEA has not issued any announcements of the visit, and Post's contacts consistently say they do not believe the visit will happen this week.

Speculation on Iran's Role in Indo-Pak Conflict

¶4. (SBU) Ahmedinejad last visited India in April, and after buzz of a possible visit to Delhi, the media this week began to speculate on the purpose of such a visit at this juncture. Post contacts believe that should an Ahmedinejad visit materialize, it is likely the result of Tehran trying to carve out a mediator role for itself in the aftermath of the Mumbai terror attacks last month.

¶5. (C) Journalist Sandeep Dikshit of The Hindu was skeptical that such a visit would take place at all, but suggested that

if Delhi were to host the Iranian President, it would likely be to take advantage of Iran's influence in the region in general and in the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) in particular. "India certainly needs Iran for pre-empting any criticism of India's role in the region in case Pakistan were to lobby among the OIC members for moral and material support (against India) to cope with her moments of crisis" said Dikshit. At a recent conference of the Indian Heads of Mission, Indian envoys serving in Islamic countries were urged to garner maximum support from those quarters where Pakistan can lobby against India in the name of Islamic solidarity, according to Dikshit.

16. (C) Amit Baruah, Foreign Affairs Editor of the capital's most circulated news daily, The Hindustan Times, said a visit by Ahmedinejad, if it materialized, would be designed to create positive regional atmospherics. Baruah pointed out that the ruling Congress party would like to send the "right" signal to the Muslim electorate: that India equally cares for Islamic world leaders as it does for the United States. The visits of Egyptian and Turkish heads of states last month and Saudi foreign minister last week can also be seen in the same light, said Baruah. According to Professor P.R. Kumaraswamy from the School of International Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, such a visit would send the message that India is cooperating with all Muslim countries.

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